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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, September 8, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "KIEFFER PEARS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Publication available, Farmers' Bulletin 1796-F, Handling and preparing the Kieffer Pear for Use as Food.

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Friends, you all remember the story of the Ugly Duckling who turned out to be a swan? While I can't make a perfect analogy for my subject today, perhaps we might say that the Kieffer pear has long been unjustly regarded as a sort of ugly duckling in the pear family- unwanted, and unloved, and yet almost always on hand wherever pears are grown, especially in the South.

Now the plant scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture have come forward to save the reputation of the Kieffer pear; and whether or not you wish to regard this fruit as comparable with the beautiful swan in the fairy tale, when you learn its possibilities, at least you will admit that it's not half as poor in quality as it's been believed,- if you handle it in the right way.

About 20 percent of the millions of bushels of pears produced in the United States are Kieffers. The reason they are so widely grown is that the tree is vigorous, very productive, and more resistant to blight and insect attack than most varieties. In the east, especially in farm and home orchards, it has survived where most other varieties have succumbed to the ravages of pear blight.

The fruit, as most of you know, is large and attractive and less subject to blemishes from fungi and insects than many other pomaceous fruits. (Pomaceous means a fleshy fruit, of the apple family.)

But when first picked from the tree the Kieffer pear is figuratively as hard as a rock. It has little or no real pear flavor. Even if you cook it, you can't be sure of making it soft, although I've been lucky in stewing and baking them. Just why I was lucky I only learned recently.

The plant scientists say that Kieffers are good for a number of household purposes, provided they are handled right after picking. And one of the secrets of right handling is temperature. If Kieffer pears are picked at the right stage of maturity and carefully gathered to prevent bruising; if they are stored for 2 or 3 weeks at the proper temperature, which is between 60° and 65° Fahrenheit, they will ripen in storage and develop a soft texture and pleasing flavor for eating fresh. You can also cook, can, and preserve them in a number of ways, again observing certain simple precautions.

The flesh of Kieffer pears as picked has a coarse, gritty texture and a slightly astringent taste when uncooked. Sugar content is low, and the cooked fruit requires sweetening. The "stone cells" near the core contain a substance called lignin which is not palatable, so cores must be well trimmed out.

The peculiarity of the best storage temperature- 60 to 65 degrees,- is that above it, the pears won't soften. Held at 80 to 100 degrees, even when peeled and cooked, they will remain undesirably firm and tough. As you go down the scale there is improvement in the pears until you reach the "optimum" storage temperature as the scientists call the best temperature for storage- 60 to 65 degrees.

Then if you try holding pears at colder and colder temperatures, the rate of softening becomes slower and the texture never becomes very satisfactory. When stored at 32 degrees a Kieffer pear remains as hard as at the beginning of the storage period and will stay so for several months. No matter how long you cook it after such a storage period, it remains practically as it was when freshly picked from the tree.

If one wanted to store the pears for some time before letting them ripen, the thing to do is to store them at 32 degrees, and then remove to a temperature of 60 degrees and keep them there about two weeks or even less. They will ripen more rapidly after being in 32 degree storage than just after they are harvested- in half to three-fourths the time. Ninety days, however, is about the limit of time to hold them at 32 degrees, and once ripened they must be used promptly.

Commercial firms, of course, use storage rooms with very accurately controlled temperatures when ripening Kieffer pears for canning or for other purposes. The home owner with a few Kieffer pear trees can usually ripen the fruit in a satisfactory way without a special room because the time of maturing is in September and October when out-doors temperatures are about 60 to 65 degrees anyway. In almost any home some room may be found, which, with the exercise of a little judgment as to ventilation, can be converted into a ripening room in which temperatures from 55 to 65 degrees will be easily maintained.

Once properly ripened, the Kieffer pears have many uses- even more than some of the varieties that are only eaten in the hand or in salads. They are palatable fresh, or combined with breakfast cereals, in salad or fruit mixtures. They are very satisfactory for cooking because the pieces hold their shape, even after peeling and coring. They make excellent pies, especially when a little thickening in the form of flour, cornstarch, or tapioca is added to absorb the juices that escape in baking. They're good peeled and baked.

On the farm one of the most important uses for them is for canning, insuring plenty of fruit for the winter months. You can use either glass or tin containers and can them by the water-bath method.

The ripened Kieffers also make very nice preserves, cooked in segments in a rich sirup. Cutting the pears up helps the penetration of the sirup. Sometimes a little lemon or ginger flavor it cooked with pear preserves. Pickled Kieffer pears are made in the same way as other sweet pickled fruits.

Drying Kieffers is still another way of using up the surplus fruit from the home trees. Directions for all the uses for the pears are contained in Farmers' Bulletin 1796-F, which is available free. Be sure to send for your copy well ahead of the Kieffer pear picking season.

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